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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002851

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/06/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [ECON](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: KING CHARGES NEW PM WITH ACCELERATING REFORMS

REF: A. AMMAN 2826

[1](#)B. AMMAN 2819

[1](#)C. AMMAN 2378

Classified By: CDA David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) King Abdullah has publicly instructed new PM Adnan Badran to form a government that will focus on speeding up the pace of reform, while cultivating good relations with Arab states. Initial reaction on Badran's appointment from contacts has varied, although all recognized his integrity and intellect. End Summary.

A CALL FOR REFORM

[1](#)2. (U) In his official "Letter of Designation" to incoming Prime Minister Adnan Badran, King Abdullah charged Badran with leading a government that would place reform at the center of its agenda. While noting that Jordan prided itself on assuming a "pioneering role in the region" with respect to reform, the letter stated the King and the Jordanian people were "determined ... to accelerate the pace of reform" and called on Badran to actively engage "all segments of society." The King recognized the central role of parliament, declaring that "reform cannot be realized without constructive communication with" the legislature.

[1](#)3. (U) The palace letter highlighted the work of the "national agenda" commission (ref C), which it described as drafting "a comprehensive reform process which includes eradicating poverty and unemployment, improving living standards and raising income." Achieving these economic goals will require the active participation of the private sector, "the main engine for reform." The King's letter further stressed that reform encompasses "political, judicial and media reform, as well as freedom of speech," and requested that Badran's government work closely with political parties and civil society institutions. Decentralization leading to broader participation in the decision-making process was recognized as a key element in achieving a more responsive and accountable government.

ARAB BROTHERHOOD

[1](#)4. (U) Looking beyond Jordan's borders, the King wrote that Jordan would always be committed to its "deep Arab roots" and strive for constructive relations with "all Arab brethren countries." He instructed the new government to "remain supportive" of the Iraqi people by continuing to promote "their pursuit to solidify their unity and sovereignty within their independent choices and through democracy." The letter also pledged support for the Palestinians, stating that the roadmap and the Arab peace initiative are "the most practical and objective means" to achieve an independent Palestinian state.

FALLING INTO PLACE

[1](#)5. (C) Although the King has hand-picked the new cabinet (ref A), the palace nevertheless publicly urged Badran to select a "homogenous working team of efficient ministers." The palace also announced a reorganization within the Royal Court. As expected, current Deputy PM Marwan Muasher was named as new Royal Court Minister while Rania Atallah, former director of Queen Rania's office, was formally tapped as head of the Royal Court's media and information department. Outgoing PM Fayed will return to the palace as Royal Court Chief and Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the King Abdullah Fund for Development. Outgoing Royal Court Minister Samir al-Rifai takes an appointment as palace advisor, so far without portfolio.

INITIAL REACTION

16. (C) Human rights activists Asem Rababah and Fawzi Samhourri told poloff that while they were encouraged by the King's letter, they had grown wary of "empty talk." Both questioned whether Badran would be able to meet expectations. Political activist Jamal Rifai, who knows Badran personally, praised the incoming PM for his honesty, integrity and intellect. However, Rifai stated that a "powerful man" was needed to effectively lead a reformist government, and he quipped that Badran was not suitable for the position because he was "too polite." Dr. Mohammad Momani, professor of political science at Yarmouk University, characterized Badran's appointment as "undoubtedly the right step." Momani said Badran was qualified, "clean," and capable of achieving what the King requested.

COMMENT

17. (C) The letter of designation closely parallels the points made to Charge by new Royal Court Minister Marwan Muasher (ref A). The clear reformist message in the King's letter reflects his determination to achieve progress on reform, after the Fayez government dropped the ball, that he can showcase both at home and abroad. As one unnamed "senior official" told The Jordan Times, "We have no more time to waste." An April 6 briefing by Muasher for G-8 COMs gave few of the details provided to us earlier, but was another opportunity for the palace to reiterate the King's commitment to reform and desire to have a cohesive cabinet, a cohesive palace team, and harmony between the two.

18. (C) Many post officers have known Badran well, including in his capacity as a long-standing member of our Fulbright Commission. There is no question of his intellectual capacity and deeply ingrained reformist credentials. He is also recognized as a good executive, and good communicator. In some ways, he is an inspired choice. As reviewed in ref A, the challenges he will face involve dealing with political opposition from hardcore East Bank constituencies who are loyal to the monarch, but threatened by reforms. Badran's family originated in Nablus, but migrated to the East Bank in Ottoman days and became regime stalwarts (although for some rock-ribbed East Bankers, it just doesn't matter how long ago one's family left the West Bank). His brother, Muthir, is cut from very different cloth. He worked up the ranks of the intelligence service to become General Intelligence Director and then prime minister from 1989-1991, when King Hussein wanted a strong executive hand to balance significant political liberalization in parliament. Adnan Badran has no association either with the security services, or Jordan's political factions, which accounts for part of his appeal to the King. However, it also means he has few natural political allies in a place where moderates and reformists have yet to organize themselves effectively. Badran will have to lean heavily on the King and the few political "wisemen" expected to join the government if he is to succeed in generating and maintaining legislative momentum for reform.

19. (U) Minimize considered.
HALE